

VZCZCXYZ0000
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHUL #0061/01 0140923
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 140923Z JAN 10
FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6706
INFO RUCNKOR/KOREA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUACAAA/COMUSKOREA INTEL SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA J5 SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RHMFISS/COMUSFK SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 000061

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/14/2030
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PHUM](#) [KPAO](#) [KWNM](#) [KTIP](#) [SOCI](#) [KS](#) [KN](#)
SUBJECT: SPECIAL ENVOY KING'S MEETINGS WITH HUMAN RIGHTS
NGOS

Classified By: POL M/C James L. Wayman. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) Summary: During his January 11-14 visit to Seoul, refugee leaders told Special Envoy for North Korean Human Rights Issues Robert King that exposure to the outside world -- largely through radio broadcasts and South Korean DVDs -- has had a profound impact on North Korean society, and that exposure to capitalism via black markets has prompted many North Korean women to flee the DPRK in search of a better life. Scholars and refugee leaders also underscored to Ambassador King the growing impact of ROK-based refugee remittances and cell phones on North Koreans living in the provinces along the Sino-Korean border. Some of the humanitarian assistance-focused NGOs called for a more "balanced" approach to improving basic human rights conditions in the North by permitting more economic and humanitarian aid to be provided to non-elites. End summary.

DPRK Refugees/Scholars: DVDs and North Korean Minds

¶2. (C) During his January 11-14 visit to Seoul, Special Envoy for North Korean Human Rights Issues Robert King exchanged views with a wide range of North Korean refugee community leaders, NGO leaders, and ROK scholars. Former North Korean refugees like Kim Heung-kwang, now President of the North Korea Intellectuals' Solidarity (NKIS) and a professor at Kyonggi University, told Ambassador King that exposure to the outside world -- largely through radio broadcasts and South Korean DVDs -- has had a profound impact on ordinary North Koreans as well as elites.

¶3. (C) However, Lee Keum-soon, a senior researcher at the Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU), disputed Kim's view. Lee claimed that KINU research suggested that most North Koreans do not relate what they see on DVDs with their own circumstances; they view programs from the South as entertainment, not a reflection of reality. Kang Cheol-hwan, a North Korean gulag survivor and author of the acclaimed memoir "Aquariums of Pyongyang," asserted that while KINU's findings may be true for uneducated North Koreans, most elite North Koreans -- the regime's bedrock -- understand what they see on ROK DVDs and "realize the contradictions" between North and South.

Black Markets: Catalyst for Defection by Women?

¶4. (C) The first North Korean refugee to participate in the International Visitors Leadership Program, Ms. Kang Su-jin, stated that, unlike men who are forced to begin 10 years of military service at age 18, the failure of the public distribution system in the 1990s forced most North Korean women to engage in local black market activities after high

school graduation. At these local markets, she explained, North Korean women are exposed to primitive capitalism. Ms. Kang asserted that the realization that a person can earn a living separate from State control is a common catalyst for defection by women eager to improve their standard of living -- and that of their children/families) and concluded this is why over 80 percent of North Korean refugees are women. (Note: Ms. Kang is President of the Coalition for North Korean Women's Rights, an NGO that empowers female refugees with technical and entrepreneurial skills. End note.)

Refugees Provide Lifeline to DPRK Kin

15. (U) The scholars and refugee leaders also discussed the growing impact of ROK-based refugee remittances and cell phones in creating alternative support mechanisms for DPRK citizens. They said Chinese telecommunication providers have made it easy to call a North Korean cell phone within 30 kilometers of the PRC border. Ms. Kang related that she, like many refugees, calls North Korea daily. The scholars and refugee leaders agreed that remittances are also playing an increasingly important role. Ms. Kang confided that she supports six family members living in the DPRK; just two months ago, she financed her daughter's defection to the ROK. The running joke within the ROK-based refugee community, according to Ms. Kang, is that ROK-based refugees are supporting 60 percent of the residents of North Hamgyong Province (Note: This is the home province for approximately 80 percent of the North Korean refugees living in the South. End note.)

Pleas for a Softer Approach

16. (C) Some of the humanitarian assistance NGOs that Ambassador King met with called for a more "balanced" approach to human rights policy towards the DPRK. For example, Lee Seung-young, Secretary General of Good Friends, and Dr. Heo Man-ho, Director of Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights, warned that hunger and poverty were the most pressing human rights challenges in North Korea.

17. (C) Park Chang-bin, Vice-Chairman of World Vision Korea, called for the U.S. and ROK to allow increased humanitarian and economic assistance to the North in order to improve basic conditions for ordinary people. Park was joined by the presidents of humanitarian organizations like Okedongmu Children in Korea, the Korean Sharing Movement in underscoring that, in their view, human rights in North Korea was not merely a political issue but one that covered women's rights, children's rights, and anti-trafficking efforts as well.
STEPHENS